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Union Budget 2022: Emphasis on mental healthcare

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National Tele Mental Health programme to launched

The Union Budget for 2022-23 has been presented by the Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

Healthcare

Stating that the pandemic has accentuated mental health problems in people of all ages across the country, the FM has announced that a National Tele Mental Health programme will be launched, to give better access to quality mental health counseling and care services.

"This will include a network of 23 tele-mental health centres of excellence, with NIMHANS being the nodal centre and International Institute of Information Technology-Bangalore (IIITB) providing technology support", she said.

During the budget announcement, the FM also mentioned that an open platform for the National Digital Health Ecosystem will be rolled out. It will consist of digital registries of health providers and health facilities, unique health identity and universal access to health facilities.

Startups

The FM has proposed extending the tax holiday scheme to startups incorporated till March 31, 2023, in addition to the startups that had already been eligible for the exemption. She also said that Venture Capital and Private Equity invested more than Rs 5.5 lakh crore last year facilitating one of the largest startup and growth ecosystem.

PLI Scheme

"The Productivity Linked Incentive (PLI) in 14 sectors for achieving the vision of AtmaNirbhar Bharat has received excellent response, with potential to create 60 lakh new jobs, and an additional production of ` 30 lakh crore during next 5 years. A scheme for design-led manufacturing will be launched to build a strong ecosystem for 5G as part of the Production Linked Incentive Scheme", she mentioned.

Special Economic Zones

The FM said, "The Special Economic Zones Act will be replaced with a new legislation that will enable the states to become partners in ‘Development of Enterprise and Service Hubs’. This will cover all large existing and new industrial enclaves to optimally utilise available infrastructure and enhance competitiveness of exports."

Custom exemptions

In review of customs exemptions and tariff simplification, she said, "In the last two budgets we have rationalised several customs exemptions. We have once again carried out an extensive consultation, including by crowd sourcing and as a result of these consultations, more than 350 exemption entries are proposed to be gradually phased out. These include exemption on certain agricultural produce, chemicals, fabrics, medical devices and drugs and medicines for which sufficient domestic capacity exists. Further, as a simplification measure, several concessional rates are being incorporated in the Customs Tariff Schedule itself instead of prescribing them through various notifications."

Sunrise Opportunities

The FM mentioned that artificial intelligence, Geospatial Systems and Drones, Semiconductor and its eco-system, Space Economy, Genomics and Pharmaceuticals, Green Energy, and Clean Mobility Systems have immense potential to assist sustainable development at scale and modernize the country. "For R&D in these sunrise opportunities, in addition to efforts of collaboration among academia, industry and public institutions, government contribution will be provided", she said.

Industry reactions to the Union budget 2022-23

Thumbs UP

"Fiscal prudence and business ease has been the theme. 35% increase in capital expenditure will drive infra and jobs - Positive rhetoric with no negative surprises = balanced budget"

Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, Executive Chairperson, Biocon

"*The pandemic has caused a silent global mental health epidemic. The use of telemedicine to diagnose and treat such patients has proved to be highly effective given the unobtrusive nature of the interaction which also ensures patient privacy. Given the shortage of mental health professionals, especially in rural areas, telemedicine will greatly enhance accessibility for patients requiring psychiatric help."*

Dr Rana Mehta, Partner and Leader Healthcare, PwC India

"It is heartening that the Union Budget 2022 identifies Genomics and Pharmaceuticals as 'sunrise' sectors. This would enable well-rounded development beyond employment and access to enhanced industry efficiencies and competitiveness, which will go a long way in attracting increased investments in biopharmaceutical innovation. Our progress in research and development is inextricably linked to fostering a culture of innovation. Allowing for additional provisions towards establishing a stronger IPR ecosystem in the country is imperative to improve the Ease of Doing Index in India and further propel FDI in the pharmaceutical sector."

Vani Manja, Country Managing Director, Boehringer Ingelheim India

"As a strong ally of mental health, it's gratifying to see that mental health has got a rare mention in Union Budget 2022-23. This shows the government's acceptance and concern towards holistic health and not just physical health which has been brought to the fore by the pandemic. The proposed National Tele-Mental Health program will be indeed a strong step towards supporting the mental health and emotional well-being of individuals, families, and society at large. Post pandemic, especially since 2020 mental health issues are no more considered an urban phenomenon but have spread across small towns in India and need to make mental health services more accessible is bigger than ever."

Subhamoy Dastidar, Director, AtEase

"In view of the impending series of state elections, it is a remarkable Budget devoid of tempting populist announcements and setting the roadmap for India@100 focusing on the creation of both capital and social infrastructure and setting up a strong foundation for accelerated growth."

Dr Harish Pillai, CEO, Metro Pacific Hospital

"The National Mental Health Programme and Health and Wellness Centres alone could not have reached every individual in the crisis that they might face struggling in a moment. Easy access was the primary point of concern for everyone trying to help with the issue. The government has recognised this and addressed the same by launching Tele mental health service. The budget inculcating the fact that focussing mental and emotional wellness is the need of the hour, itself talks about how progressive we are becoming in our approach as a nation."

Tarun Gupta, Co-founder, LISSUN

"With the launch of the open platform for the National Digital Health Ecosystem, this particular gap will be filled in a single go. As the Budget mentioned, the platform will consist of digital registries of health providers and health facilities, which will serve

the purpose of access and availability of information."

Dr Preet Pal Thakur, Co-founder, GlamyoHealth

"The upcoming launch of an open platform for the National Digital Health Ecosystem is exciting news for us. It will include digital registries of health providers and facilities, a unique health identity, and universal access to health facilities, all of which will aid us in saving lives by allowing us access to contextual health information in quick time, enabling faster and better medical response in emergencies."

Prabhdeep Singh, Founder and CEO, StanPlus

"Much-needed attention is given to ease of access to healthcare services through an open platform of the National Digital Health Ecosystem. The initiative taken for mental health is welcomed by the healthcare industry. Irrespective of age, gender, and occupation the need for focus on mental health is necessary given the current situation. The National Tele Mental Health programme is a positive step to support national mental health counselling and care services. Greater fund and resource allocation to enhance the healthcare infrastructure both in urban areas as well as in tier II-III towns have been prioritised. The budget also highlighted the importance of Genomics and AI aptly in future. However, a larger push to overall infrastructure, manpower and investments in Public-Private Partnerships which can help in further strengthening the healthcare ecosystem in the country remains undiscussed."

Ameera Shah, Promoter & MD, Metropolis Healthcare

Thumbs DOWN

"We were expecting the government to move forward on promised reforms and anticipated conducive measures to boost domestic manufacturing of medical devices. It is frustrating that against our expectations, the government has not included any measures to help end the 80-85 per cent import dependence forced upon India and an ever-increasing import bill of over Rs 46000 crore and promoting growth Indian Medical Device industry other than repeating last year's assurance to end custom exemptions of products that can be made in India. Sadly the union budget 2022 speech has no strategic stated measures to boost domestic manufacturing. These are the same domestic manufacturers, when imports got disrupted during the COVID-19 crisis, the government relied heavily on them to meet the rising demand of essential covid items for the country pushing the Indian medical devices sector to become self-reliant."

Rajiv Nath, Forum Coordinator, Association of Indian Medical Device Industry (AiMeD)

"It was expected the government to look at increasing the healthcare expenditure above 2.5 per cent of the GDP but there was not adequate attention paid to it. Although there had been a rise of 137% allocation in healthcare sector last year much was fulfilled in reality by the government. Overall, the proposals made in the Budget 22-23, should have made quality healthcare accessible and affordable. The government should have focused more on primary healthcare investment and made the Healthcare system as National Priority' status, as was done for the IT sector."

Dr Alok Roy, Member, FICCI, Health Services Committee and Chairman Medica Group of Hospitals

"It was disappointing not to hear of any announcement on many critical areas facing the healthcare industry, like the urgent need to raise healthcare expenditure to at least around 2.5% of GDP. Given the chronic issues facing healthcare in India, 1.8 percent falls short of addressing the lingering challenges on the ground. We also need universal health coverage to enforce uniformity of treatment through cross-subsidy, devoid of financial strain and debt traps for the economically challenged. I was also expecting heartening policy measures on many other key issues; like the investments in tech-enabled systems using predictive genomics to fight the evolving mutations and likelihood of newer microorganisms, rationalization of the tax structure around life-saving drugs and emergency treatments, as also lowering of GST slabs and raising of tax deduction limits that are imperative to serve the larger cause of insurance."

Dr B S Ajaikumar, Executive Chairman, HealthCare Global Enterprises

"In Budget 2022, a lot of impetus has been laid on healthcare and mental health, which is a step in the right direction. However, oral health has not got the importance that it deserves. It is a well-established fact that oral well-being is the gateway to overall health. We were hoping that the Hon'ble Finance Minister would address this in the budget 2022 and announce measures to accentuate this sector. One of the ways to do this was to drive faster adoption of dental insurance in the country as we believe that this move would not just help in lowering the cost of treatment but also encourage people to visit a dentist when they need one."

Harminder Singh Multani, CEO, MyDentalPlan Healthcare

"We were expecting some announcements in terms of GST reduction for the healthcare sector covering all wellness-related services, including naturopathic to nutrition, that has not been even considered, which is a disappointment for us."

Mugdha Pradhan, CEO and Founder, iThrive

"The decision to open 23 tele health centres to boost the healthcare sector and make it more accessible for people who are living in the remotest area of the country is a welcome decision. However, the government should have also focused on preventive healthcare for NCDs as it plays most important role in keeping India Healthy."

Amol Naikawadi, Joint Managing Director, Indus Health Plus

"While the overall budget seemed growth oriented, it is devoid of necessary benefits to the healthcare sector. Although the announcement on the launch of a national tele mental health programme has come as a relief in view of the mental health issue which emerged as a result of the pandemic, there are many other major health concerns which need to be addressed like stress and lifestyle issues which are also regarded as direct result of the pandemic."

Shailesh Guntu, CEO, Milann Fertility & Birthing Hospitals

"I think it is great to see an increase in digital health and telehealth will absolutely help but telehealth applications must be across the board. It must be included that there is tele education, telediagnosis, there should be tele therapeutic and gradually we must be decentralized whereby healthcare is brought to all parts of the country. There must be also a significant investment in medical devices because currently, we import, which keeps the healthcare cost very high and not affordable to many of the people within the country."

Dr Sudhir Prem Srivastava M.D. Founder, Chairman & CEO - SS INNOVATIONS

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